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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the results of a survey that queried 34 Hungarian teachers of gifted children on the definition of gifted children, developing giftedness, behavior problems of gifted children, enrichment activities, and parent participation. The teachers were attending in-service training on giftedness. Findings of the survey indicate that most teachers believed gifted children had better achievement in some school subject, had outstanding abilities in thinking, and were motivated. Teachers believed the most effective ways of teaching gifted students included individual treatment, announcing school competitions, study circles, optional subjects, grouping according to ability, establishing special classes, visiting bigger libraries, and going to university lectures. Common problems among the gifted were identified as asking a lot of questions, interrupting the teachers' explanations, being too critical of others, finishing a task sooner than others and then dealing with extraneous matters, reading secretly under the desk because the lesson is boring, and forgetfulness. Teacher characteristics that help in teaching gifted children are also discussed and include openness, knowledge of subject, creativity, a good sense of humor, motivation, and ability to adapt to the requirements of the student. (CR)

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TEACHERS' OPINION ABOUT THE NATURE OF GIFTEDNESS

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The Department of Educational Psychology has been involved in research work concerning the development of abilities for decades. The development of giftedness became a central issue in our studies during the second half of the 80s. Since then we have had a close relationship with the schools of the region. The practical side of the development of giftedness is helped in a number of ways by our department. The most important ones are the following:

- We help to select talented children by different psychological means.
- We monitor their development by measuring their progress.
- We take part in planning the programs in every semester.
- We have workshops for teachers taking part in the program.
- We organize practical classes to help children to get to know themselves and to find effective individual learning strategies.
- We have lectures and consultation with parents.
- We organize workshops on communication development and pedagogical attitude development for teachers.

Even these few elements of our work show that we consider it to be important to provide in-service training for teachers who take part in talent developing programs.

As a result of our intensive cooperation with schools it turned out that there was a need for systematic in-service training so that teachers could go on with the program. So in 1992 we started our first postgraduate course named "psychological bases for the development of giftedness."

It consisted of 120 classes. This September we began the third such course, and teachers are increasingly interested. The colleagues at the Department of Psychology of HAS, especially Mária Herskovits, who is a well-kown Hungarian expert in this field, contribute a lot to our work. We discuss the following questions:

- an up-to-date interpretation of talent;
- the methodological problems of selecting talents;
- the role of school programs in the development of talent;
- the cooperation of school and family;
- the importance of advice and its forms;
- talented students with unsatisfactory achievement;
- creativity and verbality;
- pedagogical attitude and talent development;

- special talent development (music, mathematics, foreign language);
- international aspects of talent development;
- Studying practical workshops of talent development.

To give information about Hungarian and foreign researches we not only organize consultations but we also edited a two-volume collection of texts, and the third volume is just being prepared. (Balogh-Herskovits, 1993, 1994.)

In our present lecture we would like to highlight what teachers thought of the main problems of talent development as a result of the course they attended. We gained information with the help of structured questionnaires and informal interviews with the participating teachers. (Questionnaire will be shown later)

The questionnaire can be devided into two major parts. Some questions concern the theoretical background of the 120-class in-service training (e.g. how to define what a gifted child is like, how to treat a talented child with unsatisfactory achievements etc.)

Other questions concern individual experiences, opinions about gifted children.

We did not mean to test their theoretical knowledge. On the contrary, we were much more interested in what their attitudes are, what they think of today's Hungarian school system and of their own roles as educators. Both in the training and in the questionnaire we had primary school and secondary school teachers.

They came from different types of schools (e.g. musical primary school), so besides dealing with gifted children they face special problems and situations day by day.

They enrolled in voluntarily, nobody, not even the headmaster, forced them to participate in the work of the program. They were simply motivated to cope with the requirements of the training. We had 34 people, 33 ladies and gentleman.

We would like to divide our lecture into three further parts:

1. The presentation of the questionnaire
2. The presentation of the results
3. General conclusions, our further plans

As you can see it below I we wrote 15 different questions that are also related to one another in their contents.

1. The questionnaire

1. Give the definition of a talented child. (Also rely on your own experience in your teaching practice.)
2. What subcategories can you set up within the category of "talented child"?
3. Below you find opposing concepts. Circle the number that you think expresses the development of talented children in Hungarian schools.

Individual aspects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	aspects of the society
Focusing on students	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Focusing on subjects
Advice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Direct guidance
Working together	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Teacher's lecture
Student plans	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Teacher plans
Inner motivation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Outer motivation
Learning based on discretion	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Learning based on strictness
Focusing on development	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Focusing on results

Independence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Teacher dominates
Subjectiving	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Objectiving
Spontaneity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Regulations

4. Which do you think are the most effective ways of developing giftedness at school?
5. What do you think of selecting classes according to talent (school achievement)?
6. How can you get a talented child with unsatisfactory achievement to have better results?
7. What kind of behavioral abnormalities produced by gifted students that you can forgive?
8. Tell the most pleasant experience you had with a gifted student.
9. Tell the most unpleasant experience you had with a gifted student.
10. What should a teacher be like who deals with talented students?
11. What are the means that a family should have to help a talented student to develop?
12. In what fields can teachers and parents cooperate to help a talented student to develop?
13. Besides school what other institutions and activities would you find useful for dealing with gifted students?
14. List some changes that you would make in your own work to deal with gifted students in a more appropriate way.
15. What use the major points that this course has changed in your own opinion in connection with triating talented students?

Participating teachers were given the questionnaires at the end of the course, and they had 90-100 minutes to answer the questions.

The majority of the questions are open so that teachers can list a good number of experiences, ideas, suggestions without any formalities. They made use of this opportunity, so we have a lot of data at hand to be studied.

In this lecture, of course, we cannot give an absolutely detailed survey. We would rather concentrate on some important questions, typical opinions.

Relying on our connections with a lot of schools and their teachers we can state that what we found in the questionnaires a clear representation of the way of thinking typical of Hungarian primary and secondary school teachers, about life, the treatment of gifted students and its ups and downs.

2. The results

- Major points in the definition of gifted children
  - In some school subject they have much better achievement (70 % of teachers answered)
  - have outstanding abilities in thinking (70 %)
  - are motivated (65 %)
  - are responsive to problems
  - know more than the teacher in some fields (50 %)
  - have a lot of ideas (45 %)
  - have good imagination (40 %)

- have a good sense of humour (40 %)
- their emotional development lags behind their intellectual development (50 %)

It is seen in this list that from their own experiences the teachers used phrases that can be found in the literature of the topic as well.

It is especially important to realize that there is usually a gap between talented children's intellectual abilities and emotional selves. (A. Harry Passow 1991.)

It is a positive opinion that in certain fields talented children know more than their teachers. About half of the teachers asked considered this a significant criterion.

◆ As far as the opposite notions are concerned in question 3 teachers are not of a high opinion in connection with the treatment of giftedness at school.

In our summary chart you can see the average circled.

Individual aspects	1	2	3	(4)	5	6	7	aspects of the society
Focusing on students	1	2	3	4	(5)	6	7	Focusing on subjects
Advice	1	2	3	(4)	5	6	7	Direct guidance
Working together	1	2	3	(4)	5	6	7	Teacher's lecture
Student plans	1	2	3	4	5	(6)	7	Teacher plans
Inner motivation	1	2	3	4	(5)	6	7	Outer motivation
Learning based on discretion	1	2	3	4	(5)	6	7	Learning based on strictness
Focusing on development	1	2	3	4	5	(6)	7	Focusing on results
Independence	1	2	3	4	5	(6)	7	Teacher dominates
Subjectiving	1	2	3	(4)	5	6	7	Objectiving
Spontaneity	1	2	3	4	(5)	6	7	Regulations

It is obvious at first glance that the averages are on the right hand side. The results, the teacher's activities and dominance is stressed everywhere.

Outer motivations, regulations and subject centeredness are very typical.

These opinions are even more thought-provoking if we think of the fact that gifted students need more spontaneity, independence, less structured tasks directly meant for the individual. (Wei-Fan Kuo, 1992). We think that one of the cue notions in the list is result centeredness, which strongly influences some other factors.

We have already observed in several cases (and teachers mentioned it as well) that the psychic tension of gaining and preserving a good reputation of a school falls on a couple of excellent students. There are students that are expected to represent their schools at town, country and national competitions. This, unfortunately, can lead to exhaustion, indifference and even disgust with studying.

Perhaps we should give more freedom and independence not only to our gifted children but to the others as well.

However, it is not surprising that most of our teachers are aware of this, and they know the forms of effective talent development. It is shown in their answers to question 4. The most typical answers are:

- individual treatment
- announcing school competitions
- study circles, optional subjects
- school radio/TV

- grouping according to ability
- establishing special classes
- visiting bigger libraries, archives (so that they can research)
- going to university lectures

It would also be important to find out what obstacles they might face when carrying out there ideas (e.g. limited financial possibilities at school). And which are the problems that could be solved with a little creativity or resourcefulness.

For us the most interesting question was the 7th one. What kind of behavioral abnormalities produced by gifted students that you can forgive?

Let us see a list of the most common answers

- they ask a lot of unusual questions (45 %)
- interrupt the teacher's explanation (40 %)
- are too critical of others including the teacher (30 %)
- deal with other things because of finishing the task sooner than the others (50 %)
- read secretly under the desk because the lesson is boring (45 %)
- are forgetful: do not bring their things to class or lose things (55 %)

The numbers in brackets show that teachers usually shut their eyes to gifted students' faults.

However, one third of the teachers asked were of the opposite opinion.

They are convinced that we must not be too *sympathetic* with gifted students because excellent students need more discipline and self-discipline the lack of which may stop the development of talent. Questions 8 and 9 were interested in the most pleasant and unpleasant experiences with gifted students. In this section most of the teachers recalled cases when they were on good terms with a talented student, they could find a proper way of controlling him/her, and could motivate him/her. There are students whom the other teachers found hopeless because of their extravagant, hardly controllable behavior.

From the answers it seems that such situations are challenging for a teachers. Quite often the good old methods done with routine simply do not work. True pedagogical talent and resourcefulness are required to treat gifted and at the same time non-conformist students so that we can establish a fruitful cooperation with them.

All the negative experiences can be derived from the failure in this field. When the teacher could not influence the student, who therefore gave up the subject or activity.

He/she lost interest in school, did not apply to a university or college and consequently got lost. Most of the teachers were touched by this failure and they were trying to find the mistake in themselves.

Why could not why prevent it?

Question ten is directly connected to these problems, because we asked them to write down the most important qualities of teachers dealing with gifted children.

Our list contains the most important qualities mentioned by the teachers.

- open, accepting things (85 %)
- knows a lot in his/her subject (85 %)
- creative, imaginative (80 %)
- has a good sense of humour (70 %)
- can motivate (75 %)
- can adapt him/herself to the requirements of the student 55 %

- has empathy (50 %)
- has self-criticism (45 %)
- can debate
- enthusiastic, ambitious

From this list it turns out that what they think of an ideal teacher is the same as what we can read in a lot of other studies. (Gold, M.J. 1979)

All the teachers think that the above qualities apply for teachers dealing with average students, too. It would be ideal for all teachers to have these qualities.

As far as cooperation of teachers and parents is concerned the teachers emphasized that they should have the same values, requirements. Teachers and parents should set goals and find activities together. They should be in touch with each other and meet not only once in several months at teacher-parent meetings, and then talk about their experiences. It should be a day after day relationship.

What out-of-school activities and institutions are important in talent developing?

- summer camps
- excursions over the weekend with a definite aim (e.g. collecting minerals for students who like biology, geography.)
- performances organized by leisure centres (e.g. concerts, lectures on astronomy)
- meeting parents who can speak about interesting things from their own special fields

Fortunately, in many schools these are not simply ideas, they are put to the test. Just to mention one example: the talent developing program in Szerencs which has a teacher-parent club with regular meetings.

Both here and at the Munich conference we had the opportunity to hear about it. (Győrik F., 1992, 1994)

To finish the analysis of the answers to the questionnaires let me quote a teacher from the course whose opinion is almost a creed and we appreciate it very much.

> *"First of all I want to change myself. I have to flexible and capable of developing. I have to keep up with our ever-changing time and youth so that I can talk to them about everything. All children need different methods, methods, materials to be learnt. But we have to be patient. Today there are lots of courses. We have to go to these courses and give up our old ideas and methods if it turns out that they are wrong."*

3. Summary, our further plans

In our lecture our main aim was to draw a picture through the analysis of a questionnaire of Hungarian teachers' opinions who teach both average and talented students.

We wanted to show what they think of talent development, of its everyday tasks and difficulties and what should be done in the future. We relied on their practical experiences and knowledge they gained at a 120 class course.

As a conclusion we may say: they have a true-to-life image of the situation and they are ready to change. They know their responsibilities, and are aware of what a power it has for the future to deal with gifted students and to develop their mental capacities.

We are convinced that such challenges can be faced only with the cooperation and mutual help of psychologists and teachers.

And in this relationship both sides have to know how the other works and with what possibilities.

That is why we find it important to have informal talks with teachers, to organize courses and write questionnaires for them so that we can find out as much as possible about teachers' work and opinions.

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